

It Took a Village

The Amazing Story of the Forbeck Quadruplets



By Matt and Ann Forbeck

This is an excerpt from a full book we hope to finish someday. This part is the story of the quads' birthday.

From: Matt Forbeck

Date: Wed Jun 5, 2002 11:01:18 PM US/Central

To: Forbeck@yahoo.com

Subject: [Forbeck] Happy, Happy, Happy, Happy Birthday!

Hi All:

Today, Ann and I welcomed four more children into our family. They are:

Patrick Ray, 2 lbs. 12 oz., 15 1/8 in., born 1:51 PM
Nicholas Joseph, 2 lbs. 9 oz., 14 in., born 1:51 PM
Kenneth Matthew, 2 lbs. 8 oz., 14 3/4 in., born 1:52 PM
Helen Ann, 1 lbs. 8 oz., 12 1/2 in., born 1:53 PM

Tuesday afternoon, a Doppler (ultrasound) scan of the babies' placentas showed that the placentas were breaking down earlier than we would have hoped. Subsequent heart monitoring and other ultrasounds showed that the babies seemed to be doing well despite this. However, we were told we were going to have to deliver by Thursday or Friday.

Wednesday morning, at 5 AM or so, Ann's uterus started contracting hard. After some more monitoring, we scheduled the C-section for Thursday at 9:30 AM. At noon Wednesday, an ultrasound showed that Ann's cervix had dropped



about half its length from a previous scan, and we were told that we were going into surgery at 1 PM. The preparations were quick but went well. I attended the surgery with Ann and peeked over the curtain to give her a play-by-play as the doctors quickly and expertly removed our babies from Ann's womb. Within a matter of minutes, we were

suddenly parent again—four times over.

The babies were immediately whisked off to the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit). After Ann was recovered enough, we finally got to visit the babies. Ann was actually wheeled into the unit in her hospital bed. They are currently all stable, and we have high hopes for them.

Ann was 29 weeks pregnant the morning of the delivery. This means the babies are 11 weeks



premature. The doctors tell us that the babies will likely be here in the NICU through to their due date, which means they're looking at 11 or so weeks here in the hospital.

In other words, although the babies are here and we already love them dearly, we are far from out of the woods yet. Every day could be a battle for them, and only the passage of time will tell us how they will fare. We'd like to thank you each for your support for us so far and ask that you continue to keep our beautiful but tiny new children in your hearts, thoughts, and prayers until they are all able to safely come home with us. We really do appreciate your support, and we know the babies do too.

Tired, but happy. Scared, but optimistic,

Matt, Ann, Marty, Patrick, Nicholas, Kenneth, and Helen





Once we were in the operating room, it got hot. There were over 20 people in the place, many more than the place was built for. Each of the babies had a warming bed ready and waiting for him or her, plus a doctor, a couple of nurses, and a respiratory therapist. Ann had two surgeons, two nurses, and an anesthesiologist working with her. Then there were the photographer and me. Once the babies came in, we had four more souls in the room, of course, fighting with all they had to be counted.

Ann was awake for the entire surgery, with only an epidural for the pain. When she gave birth to Marty, we used the Bradley method of husband-coached natural childbirth. Ann never saw a needle through the entire process, and Marty's birth was straight out a textbook, smooth as could be.

This time around was the polar opposite. Ann wasn't allowed to even see the surgery as it took place. You can expect a lot from a person, but watching calmly as your belly is sliced open and four premies are taken out is a bit much.

The center of attention here is Ann's belly and the babies about to be taken from it. The two surgeons are Dr. Susan Hendricks (to the left) and Dr. Howard Kaufman (to the right). They, along with Dr. Rick Hume and an army of the world's best nurses, took care of Ann while she was on the High-Risk Moms Ward at Rockford Memorial Hospital.



During the surgery, I stood next to Ann's head and held her hand. Since she couldn't see what was happening, I stood up and gave her the play-by-play. Talking about it helped keep me calm too. I could focus on helping Ann.

As Dr. Hendricks told me, "If you feel faint, sit down. We don't have anyone in here to help you." I never wavered for a moment. There was no way I was going to miss a moment of the births of four of my children at once.



A few minutes later, Patrick Ray Forbeck came into the world. This picture is one of our absolute favorites. The look on Dr. Hendricks's face says it all: "Welcome to the world, little guy!" Even though a mask covers the lower part of her face, you can see from her eyes that she's grinning from ear to ear.

When he was born, the doctors thought at first that he was Nick. Once Pat was out, though, they looked down and saw Nick still lying there, so they corrected themselves right away.

We're used to some surprises at birth. When Ann was pregnant with Marty, the doctors performed an ultrasound that said he was a girl. All along, the doctor's warned us that such tests were only about 80% accurate. Sometimes those fetuses are just too shy to show their nature.

Sure enough, when Marty was born, we got a shock. He came out headfirst, so at first I thought, "There's my daughter's head!" When the rest of him came free though, I thought, "There's my son!"





Only seconds after Patrick emerged, Nicholas (the real one this time) followed. They were literally born on the same minute: 1:51 PM on June 5, 2002.

Above, you can see Dr. Hendricks looking after Patrick as she hands Nicholas to the nurse who had just taken Patrick to his warming bed. Patrick was crying already, which was a huge relief to us all.

The kids each spent the first day or so in these open-air beds which come equipped with large heaters that hang over

them and keep them warm. Later, they would be moved into the plastic boxes known as Isolettes.

In those crucial first moments and even hours, though, the doctors and nurses need to be able to get at the kids directly. The status of a premature baby (preemie) can change in an instant (as it would later with Nick), and there's no time to waste hassling with sticking your hands through plastic portals or dismantling a larger bed.

The sure-handed man to the left here is Dr. Prahba Dosi, who eventually became the neonatologist for all four of the babies. He followed them from birth until they left the hospital. You can see he's off to a running start here as he sweeps Ken away to his warming bed. Those are Ken's spindly little legs sticking up in the air as he reaches out with a hand toward Dr. Dosi.





Above, you can see Dr. Dosi with Ken once again. The photographer managed to grab the shot even though Dr. Dosi was racing to Ken's warming bed. Ken was crying, although he stopped soon after. The doctor set Ken down and went back for Helen in a flash.

Ken was born only seconds after Nick, although he wound up listed in another minute: 1:52 PM. The first three babies came out like shots: boom, boom, boom. Helen, though, took just a little bit longer.

Little Helen had been shoved so far up under Ann's ribs that it took the doctors a bit longer to find her. Dr. Hendricks was almost up to her elbows in Ann's belly before she found Helen.

Helen was the only one who didn't cry at all. She wasn't breathing when Dr. Hendricks pulled her out, and she had to be intubated right away. That's when they put a tube down the throat and into the lungs so they can pump air in, either by hand or machine.



Dr. Dosi's job as baby deliverer done (no stork was ever faster), he sets in to getting Helen breathing. You can see that he has his index finger in her mouth to hold her head steady and he's poking a tube into her nose to clear the passages. Soon after, he intubated her and hooked up her breathing tube to a blue bag that one of the nurses used to keep air pumping into her.

Each team set to work stabilizing its baby right away. As soon as they were able, the teams moved the babies from the operating room to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). When the kids were wheeled past Ann's head, the doctors presented each one to us so we could get a good look at them. I got to hold two of them. This is Nicholas in my arms here. I've never been more humbled.



Ann was still numb from the waist down and couldn't move. She wasn't able to hold the babies, but the doctors wheeled the kids as close to her as they could. Below, you can see Ann reaching out to touch Helen from her spot on the operating table as Drs. Hendricks and Kaufman work to close up her belly. I'm looking on over Ann and Helen while Dr. Dosi pulls aside Helen's blankets so we can see all of her. The nurse to the right is working the bag attached to Helen's breathing tube.

According to the clock, Helen had come into the world only a minute after Ken, at 1:53 PM. In the space of only two minutes (and 29 weeks before that), we'd added four children to our family. Now the only trick was making sure that they'd survive the experience.

At only 1 pound and 8 ounces, Helen seemed like she'd have the hardest time of it. "It's good that it's the girl," Dr. Dosi told us. "Girls are tough."



The babies were so small, I never thought the doctors would let me hold any of them. If I'd been astonished when Nicholas had been handed to me, though, I was shocked when Dr. Dosi brought Helen to my arms.

To the right here, you can see me holding Helen as gently as I could for as long as they'd let me, which wasn't much. That blue bag the nurse held over her was the only thing keeping her lungs moving, so she had a date with the NICU she had to keep.



Except when I held two of the babies, I held Ann's hand all throughout the surgery. She was strong and resolute throughout it all. She wept with relief when she heard Patrick crying, but she kept herself together amazingly well.

If you look closely, you can see a number of plastic bracelets hanging from my wrist. They gave us each an identification bracelet for each of the babies, and Ann had one for herself too. We wore them for the first few days as our admission pass to see our babies in the NICU. Within a few days, though, all the staff there knew our faces and told us we could take them off.





This is Patrick Ray Forbeck, the first one out of Ann's womb. He was named for Ann's dad (Pat Kolinsky) and my mother's father (Ray Fink).

Pat weighed 2 pounds, 12 ounces. He was the only one of the kids who never had to be intubated. When he came out, he started crying right away, and Ann burst into tears. She was terrified that none of the kids would be able to breathe on his or her own, and the sound of Patrick's voice was like a song.



This is Nicholas Joseph Forbeck. He was named for Ann's father's father (N. J. Kolinsky). He didn't need to be intubated at first either, although that would happen later. When Nick was in the womb, we called him "Atlas." As the one closest to Ann's cervix, Baby A, as we knew him then, had to hold up all the others above him whenever Ann wasn't lying flat.

Nick was born in the same minute as Pat. The doctors got those kids out of there fast. In fact, there were only two minutes between Pat (the first) and Helen (the last).

This is Kenneth Matthew Forbeck, the third one out. He was named for my father (Ken Forbeck) and me. In the womb, he was Baby D, but when it came time to take him out, he was nearer to the hole in Ann's belly than Helen was.

Ken was crying when they hauled him out, but he stopped soon after and had to be intubated. The metal ring taped around his mouth holds the breathing tube in place.



This is Helen Ann Forbeck, last and (in terms of size) least. She was a full pound smaller than Ken, the next largest kid. Ultrasounds the day before had showed her to be much larger. Apparently the technicians had measured one of the boys twice instead. Even with sophisticated medical equipment, it can be hard to pick out one baby from another in such a crowded womb.

Helen was named for my mother (Helen Forbeck) and for Ann. That left out Ann's mother, Marlyn Kolinsky, but Marty was named after her and her father Martin Burik.

